

iMAtinib

Pronunciation: i-MA-ti-nib

Other Name(s): Gleevec®

Appearance: tablet in various strengths, shapes and sizes

This handout gives general information about this cancer medication.

You will learn:

- who to contact for help
- what the medication is
- how it is given
- what to expect while on medication



This handout was created by Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) together with patients and their caregivers who have also gone through cancer treatment. It is meant to help support you through your cancer treatment and answer some of your questions.

This information does not replace the advice of your health care team. Always talk to your health care team about your treatment.

Who do I contact if I have questions or need help?

My cancer health care provider is: _____

During the day I should contact: _____

Evenings, weekends and holidays: _____

What is this treatment for?

For treating certain blood cancers (leukemias), blood disorders, gastrointestinal stromal tumours (GIST) and sarcomas.

What should I do before I start this treatment?

Tell your health care team if you have or had significant medical condition(s), especially if you have / had:

- heart problems,
- liver disease (including hepatitis),
- kidney problems,
- bleeding problems,
- a thyroid condition,
- if you are taking blood thinners,
- or have any allergies.



Remember To:

- ✓ Tell your health care team about all of the other medications you are taking.
- ✓ Keep taking other medications that have been prescribed for you, unless you have been told not to by your health care team.

You will have a blood test to check for hepatitis B before starting treatment. See the [Hepatitis B and Cancer Medications](#) pamphlet for more information.

How is this treatment given?

- Imatinib is usually taken once a day by mouth. Talk to your health care team about how and when to take your medication.
- If you are taking the 800 mg daily dose, it should be taken as 400 mg twice a day, to prevent your body from absorbing too much iron.
- Swallow your imatinib tablets whole. Take them with a full glass of water either during or just after a meal.
- The 400 mg tablet may be split in half, but do not crush or chew the tablet.
- If you cannot swallow the tablet, place it in a glass of water or apple juice, (use 200 mL for 400 mg tablet or 50 mL for 100 mg tablet). Stir with a spoon to completely break up the tablet, then drink the contents right away. Rinse the glass with water or apple juice and then drink this mixture to pick up any tablet left.
- You may need tablets of more than 1 strength to have the correct dose. Ensure you identify the tablets correctly to get the right dose.
- Do not eat or drink grapefruit, starfruit, Seville oranges or their juices (or products that contain these) while taking this drug. They may increase the amount of drug in your blood and increase side effects.
- If you miss a dose, skip the missed dose and take your next dose as you normally do. Do not take an extra dose to make up for the missed dose.
- If you vomit (throw up) after taking your medication, talk to your health care team about what to do.

Warning: If you take too much of this medication by accident, or if you think a child or a pet may have swallowed your medication, you must call the Ontario Poison Control Center right away at: 1-800-268-9017.

Other medications you may be given with this treatment

To Prevent Hepatitis B Flare Ups

If you have ever been infected with hepatitis B, there is a risk that this treatment can cause it to flare up (come back). Tell your health care team if you have had hepatitis B. You may need to take medication to prevent a hepatitis B flare-up.

To Prevent Tumor Lysis Syndrome (TLS)

TLS can happen when a large number of cancer cells die quickly and your body cannot get rid of them fast enough. TLS can make you very sick. Ask your health care team if you are at risk for TLS.

If you are at risk for TLS, you may be given medications before your imatinib treatment to help prevent it.

- These are called anti-uricemics (such as allopurinol), or others.

DO this while on treatment

- ✓ DO check with your health care team before getting any vaccinations, surgery, dental work or other medical procedures.
- ✓ DO tell your health care team about any serious infections that you have now or have had in the past.

DO NOT do this while on treatment

- ✗ DO NOT use tobacco products (such as smoking cigarettes or vaping) or drink alcohol while on treatment without talking to your health care team first. Smoking and drinking can make side effects worse and make your treatment not work as well.
- ✗ DO NOT take any other medications, such as vitamins, over-the-counter (non-prescription) drugs, or natural health products without checking with your health care team.
- ✗ DO NOT start any complementary or alternative therapies, such as acupuncture or homeopathic medications, without checking with your health care team.
- ✗ DO NOT eat or drink grapefruit, starfruit, Seville oranges or their juices (or products that contain these) while taking this drug. They may increase the amount of drug in your blood and increase side effects.

Will this treatment interact with other medications or natural health products?

Yes, this medication can interact with other medications, vitamins, foods and natural health products. Interactions can make this medication not work as well or cause severe side effects.

Tell your health care team about all of your:

- prescription and over-the-counter (non-prescription) medications
- natural health products such as vitamins, herbal teas, homeopathic medicines, and other supplements

Check with your health care team before starting or stopping any of them.

If you are taking a blood thinner (such as warfarin), your health care team may need extra blood tests and may change your dose.



Talk to your health care team **BEFORE** taking or using these :

- Anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen (Advil[®] or Motrin[®]), naproxen (Aleve[®]) or Aspirin[®].
- Over-the-counter products such as dimenhydrinate (Gravol[®])
- Natural health products such as St. John's Wort
- Supplements such as vitamin C
- Grapefruit juice
- Alcoholic drinks
- Tobacco
- All other drugs, such as marijuana or cannabis (medical or recreational)

What to do if you feel unwell, have pain, a headache or a fever

- ✓ **Always** check your temperature to see if you have a fever **before** taking any medications for fever or pain (such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®)).
 - Fever can be a sign of infection that may need treatment right away.
 - If you take these medications before you check for fever, they may lower your temperature and you may not know you have an infection.

How to check for fever:

Keep a digital (electronic) thermometer at home and take your temperature if you feel hot or unwell (for example, chills, headache, mild pain).

- You have a fever if your temperature taken **in your mouth (oral temperature)** is:
 - 38.3°C (100.9°F) or higher at any time

OR

 - 38.0°C (100.4°F) or higher for at least one hour.



If you do have a fever :

- ✓ **Try to contact your health care team. If you are not able to talk to them for advice, you MUST get emergency medical help right away.**
- ✓ Ask your health care team for the [Fever](#) pamphlet for more information.

If you do not have a fever but have mild symptoms such as headache or mild pain:

- ✓ Ask your health care team about the right medication for you.



Talk to your health care team before you start taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®) or ASA (Aspirin®), as they may increase your chance of bleeding or interact with your cancer treatment.



Talk to your health care team if you already take **low dose aspirin** for a medical condition (such as a heart problem). It may still be safe to take.

How will this treatment affect sex, pregnancy and breastfeeding?

Talk to your health care team about:

- How this medication may affect your sexual health.
- How this medication may affect your ability to have a baby, if this applies to you.

This medication may harm an unborn baby. Tell your health care team if you or your partner are pregnant, become pregnant during treatment, or are breastfeeding.

- If there is **any** chance you may become pregnant, you and your partner together must use **2 effective forms of birth control** at the same time until at least **15 days** after your last dose. Talk to your health care team about which birth control options are best for you.
- If you are a patient that can get somebody pregnant, you and your partner together must use **2 effective forms of birth control** at the same time until at least **6 months** after your last dose. Talk to your health care team about which birth control options are best for you.
- Do not breastfeed while on this medication and for at least **15 days** after the last dose.

How to safely store and handle this medication

- Keep this medication in the original packaging at room temperature in a dry place, away from heat and light. Keep out of sight and reach of children and pets.
- Do not throw out any unused medications at home. Bring them to your pharmacy to be thrown away safely.

How to safely touch oral anti-cancer medication

If you are a patient:

- Wash your hands before and after touching your oral anti-cancer medication.

If you are a caregiver:

- Wear nitrile or latex gloves when touching tablets, capsules or liquids.
- Wash your hands before putting on your gloves and after taking them off, even if your skin did not touch the oral anti-cancer medication.
- Throw out your gloves after each use. Do not re-use gloves.
- Do not touch oral anti-cancer medications if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

What to do if anti-cancer medication gets on your skin or in your eyes

If medication gets on your skin:

- Wash your skin with a lot of soap and water.
- If your skin gets red or irritated, talk to your health care team.

If medication gets in your eyes:

- Rinse your eyes with running water right away. Keep water flowing over your open eyes for at least 15 minutes.

What are the side effects of this treatment?

The following table lists side effects that you may have when getting imatinib. The table is set up to list the most common side effects first and the least common last. It is unlikely that you will have all of the side effects listed and you may have some that are not listed.

Read over the side effect table so that you know what to look for and when to get help. Refer to this table if you experience any side effects while on imatinib treatment.

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
Very Common Side Effects (50 or more out 100 people)	
Mild swelling in arms and legs; puffiness (may be severe) To help prevent swelling : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat a low-salt diet. • Avoid tight fitting clothing. If you have swelling in your legs , keep your feet up when sitting.	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Mild joint, muscle pain (may continue for months after treatment is stopped) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your health care team about the right medication for you to relieve muscle or joint pain. • Take your pain medication as prescribed by your doctor. • Rest often and try light exercise as it may help. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Nausea and vomiting (generally mild) May occur in hours to days after your treatment. If you have nausea or vomiting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take anti-nausea medication(s) as prescribed to you by your doctor. • Drink clear liquids and have small meals. Get fresh air and rest. • Do not eat spicy, fried foods or foods with a strong smell. • Limit caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea) and alcohol. • Contact your health care team if the prescribed anti-nausea medications are not helping to control your nausea and vomiting. Also see Nausea & Vomiting pamphlet for more information.	Contact your healthcare team if no improvement or if severe

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
Common Side Effects (25 to 49 out of 100 people)	
Diarrhea May happen days to weeks after you get your treatment. If you have diarrhea : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take anti-diarrhea medication if your health care team prescribed it. • Avoid foods or drinks with artificial sweetener (e.g. chewing gum, “diet” drinks), coffee and alcohol. • Eat many small meals and snacks instead of 2 or 3 large meals. • Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of liquids each day. Talk to your health care team if you can’t drink 6-8 cups of liquids each day when you have diarrhea. You may need special liquids with salt and sugar, called Oral Rehydration Therapy. • See the Diarrhea pamphlet for more information. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Rash; dry, itchy skin Rash may be severe in some rare cases and cause your skin to blister or peel. If this happens, get emergency medical help right away. To prevent and treat dry skin, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use skin moisturizer. • Protect your skin from the sun and the cold. • Use sunscreen with UVA and UVB protection and a SPF of at least 30. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Fatigue (tiredness) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be active and aim to get 30 minutes of moderate exercise (you are able to talk comfortably while exercising) on most days. Check with your health care team before starting any new exercise. • Pace yourself, do not rush. Put off less important activities. Rest when you need to. • Eat well and stay hydrated by drinking at least 6 to 8 glasses of water or other liquids every day (unless your doctor told you to drink more or less). • Avoid driving or using machinery if you are feeling tired. • See our Fatigue pamphlet for more information. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Pains or cramps in the belly <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have constipation or diarrhea it may be causing the pain in your belly. • If the pain is severe, gets worse or doesn’t go away, talk to your health care team about other possible causes. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
Common Side Effects (25 to 49 out of 100 people)	
Headache <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your health care team about the right medication for you to relieve headache. • Take your pain medication as prescribed by your doctor. • Rest often and try light exercise as it may help. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Infection; Low neutrophils (white blood cells) in the blood (neutropenia) When neutrophils are low, you are at risk of getting an infection more easily. Ask your health care team for the Neutropenia (Low white blood cell count) pamphlet for more information. What to look for? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you feel hot or unwell (for example if you have chills or a new cough), you must check your temperature to see if you have a fever. • Do not take medications that treat a fever before you take your temperature (for example, Advil® (ibuprofen)). • Do not eat or drink anything hot or cold right before taking your temperature. You have a fever if your temperature taken in your mouth (oral temperature) is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38.3°C (100.9°F) or higher at any time OR • 38.0°C (100.4°F) or higher for at least one hour. What to do? If your health care team has told you that you have low neutrophils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often to prevent infection. • Check with your health care team before getting any vaccines, surgeries, medical procedures or visiting your dentist. • Keep a digital thermometer at home so you can easily check for a fever. If you have a fever: If you have a fever, try to contact your health care team. If you are unable to talk to the team for advice, you must get emergency medical help right away.	If you have a fever, try to contact your health care team. If you are unable to talk to the team for advice, you MUST get emergency medical help right away.

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
Less Common Side Effects (10 to 24 out of 100 people)	
Salt imbalances It may cause muscle twitching, severe weakness or cramping, confusion and irregular heartbeat.	Get emergency medical help right away
Cough; feeling short of breath You may have cough and feel short of breath without any signs of infection, such as a sore throat or a stuffed nose.	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Dizziness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may feel light headed. Lay down if this happens. Get up and move slowly once you feel better. Do not drive a motor vehicle or use machinery if you feel dizzy. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Heartburn; stomach upset To help prevent heartburn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid fatty or spicy foods. Remain upright after eating. Drink clear liquids and eat small meals. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe
Flu-like symptoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may have fever, chills and muscle pain without any signs of infection, such as a sore throat, cough or skin rash. It may happen at any time after you receive your treatment and it usually goes away as your body gets used to the medication. Contact your health care team if these feelings bother you. Check your temperature to make sure you don't have a fever. Talk to your health care team before you start taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®) or ASA (Aspirin®), as they may increase your chance of bleeding or interact with your cancer treatment. If you do have a fever, speak to your health care team or go to the nearest emergency room. 	Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
Less Common Side Effects (10 to 24 out of 100 people)	
<p>Depression</p> <p>Everyone feels sad sometimes and having cancer can cause you to feel down. Depression is when these feelings last for weeks or months.</p> <p>To help prevent depression :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating well and exercising may give you more energy and help you feel better. Always check with your health care team before starting a new exercise program to make sure it is safe for you. • Get support from your family, friends, community and health care team. <p>If you have suicidal thoughts or think about hurting yourself contact your health team or go to your closest Emergency Department right away. See our Depression pamphlet for more information.</p>	<p>Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe</p>
<p>Trouble falling asleep</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This may be caused by one of your medications and may improve once your body gets used to the medication or when your treatment ends. • Talk to your doctor if this bothers you. 	<p>Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe</p>
<p>Abnormal liver lab tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may have yellowish skin or eyes, unusually dark pee or pain on the right side of your belly. Talk to your health care team if this happens. • Your doctor may monitor your liver regularly with a blood test. 	<p>Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe</p>
<p>Constipation</p> <p>To help prevent constipation :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink more liquids and eat well. Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of liquids each day unless you have been told otherwise. • Be Active. Exercise can help to keep you regular. • Try to eat more fiber (e.g. fruits with skin, leafy greens and whole grains). If you take opioid pain medication, ask your health care team if eating more fibre is right for you. <p>To help treat constipation :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have not had a bowel movement in 2 to 3 days you may need to take a laxative. Ask your health care team what to do. <p>See the Constipation Pamphlet for more information.</p>	<p>Contact your health care team if no improvement or if severe</p>

Side effects and what to do	When to contact doctor?
Less Common Side Effects (10 to 24 out of 100 people)	
<p>Unusual bleeding or bruising; Low platelets in the blood</p> <p>When platelets are low, you are at risk for bleeding and bruising. Ask your health care team for the Low Platelet Count pamphlet for more information.</p> <p>What to look for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch for signs of bleeding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ bleeding from your gums ◦ unusual or heavy nosebleeds ◦ bruising easily or more than normal ◦ black coloured stools (poo) or blood in your stools (poo) ◦ coughing up red or brown coloured mucus ◦ dizziness, constant headache or changes in your vision ◦ heavy vaginal bleeding <p>What to do?</p> <p>If your health care team has told you that you have low platelets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell your pharmacist that your platelet count may be low before taking any prescriptions or over-the-counter medication. • Check with your healthcare team before you go to the dentist. • Take care of your mouth and use a soft toothbrush. • Try to prevent cuts and bruises. • Ask your health care team what activities are safe for you. • Your treatment may have to be delayed if you have low platelets. Your health care team may recommend blood transfusion. <p>If you have signs of bleeding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have a small bleed, clean the area with soap and water or a saline (saltwater) rinse. Apply pressure for at least 10 minutes. <p>If you have bleeding that does not stop or is severe (very heavy), you must get emergency medical help right away.</p>	<p>Talk to your health care team if you have any signs of bleeding. If you have bleeding that doesn't stop or is severe, you MUST get emergency medical help right away</p>

Other rare, but serious side effects are possible.

If you experience ANY of the following, speak to your cancer health care provider or get emergency medical help right away:

- chest pain, shortness of breath, coughing up blood, pain in your arm or belly
- feeling confused, sudden loss of vision, trouble speaking or moving your arms or legs
- severe pain, swelling and hardening of a vein in your arm or leg
- severe pain in a bone or joint (especially around your hip)
- irregular heartbeat, fainting spells or swelling in your legs, ankles or belly
- any problems with your vision
- unusual muscle spasms, cramping, twitching, or seizures
- severe rash with fever, swollen glands, yellow skin or eyes, shortness of breath or chest pain
- sudden, severe pain in your belly (may extend to your back)
- signs of thyroid problems such as feeling very tired, dry skin, brittle nails or hair and intolerance to the cold
- signs of kidney problems such as lower back pain, swelling, peeing less than usual and unusual weight gain
- severe muscle pain or weakness and dark pee

For more information on how to manage your symptoms ask your health care provider, or visit:

<https://www.cancercareontario.ca/symptoms>.

Notes

November 2024 Updated/revised information sheet

The information set out in the medication information sheets, regimen information sheets, and symptom management information (for patients) contained in the Drug Formulary (the "Formulary") is intended to be used by health professionals and patients for informational purposes only. The information is not intended to cover all possible uses, directions, precautions, drug interactions or side effects of a certain drug, nor should it be used to indicate that use of a particular drug is safe, appropriate or effective for a given condition.

A patient should always consult a healthcare provider if he/she has any questions regarding the information set out in the Formulary. The information in the Formulary is not intended to act as or replace medical advice and should not be relied upon in any such regard. All uses of the Formulary are subject to clinical judgment and actual prescribing patterns may not follow the information provided in the Formulary.